

LEONARD SILK is an economics columnist for *The New York Times*, his son Mark, a teacher at Harvard. Like Pogo a few years ago ("I have seen the enemy and he is us"), they have taken a look around the American landscape to see if there really is an establishment. Their conclusion is that there is indeed such an organization and—surprise!—they are part of it.

At least Harvard and *The Times* are. Since the Silks discover this abiding truth quite early, one hopes that they will use the remainder of their time to at least try to demonstrate the accuracy of their judgment. An example here, a conjecture there. Perhaps an occasional analysis of the way some public policy came into being from this quarter.

Aimless Ramble

Unfortunately, such is not to be. Instead, we end up with a discursive, aimless and boring ramble through the recent and contemporary political scene. As scholarship, the book is

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hopeless. As history, it is uninformative. As social or political commentary, it is pure bunk ("With its public resistance to the anti-Red witch hunt of Senator Joe McCarthy, Harvard—fairly or exaggeratedly—was seen as the emblem of academic freedom").

An inordinate amount of time is spent on Harvard. Events there, according to the authors, are supposed to have influenced America in many powerful ways, yet no examples are given. Ever hopeful, we read on about one Harvard president after another and

their various campus brouhahas. Frankly, even if one has a Harvard connection, it *does* get a little boring.

By the time the Silks graduate us from the place and move on to the other centers of perceived establishmentarianism, it is hard to work up much enthusiasm for the journey. We've begun to feel like tired and unhappy tourists on a long, hot, dull bus tour through a thoroughly uninteresting city.

Thus we move quickly by the Ford Foundation, the Brookings Institution, the Council on Foreign Relations

and a few other centers of "power." It's all so silly and tiresome one wonders why the authors keep trying. Let's just get back to our hotel, have a drink and sack out.

Thorny Thesis

That the Silks could seriously decide that an "establishment" exists and can actually be found in the few places they describe is thoroughly dispiriting. They not only fail to prove their thesis, but also they don't really have the intellectual honesty to admit it. At the end of their book, they say: "Does it [an establishment] exist? Hav-

ing worked through all these pages . . . we are reasonably sure that it does. But, assuming that it does as we do, we think it works best as a truly secret organization, secret even from its own membership."

Twenty years ago the writer Richard Rovere wrote a tongue-in-cheek essay on the same subject. He even used the same title. Though the Silks acknowledge Rovere's spoof of the idea that there is an American establishment, they seem not to have understood it. Rovere's "analysis" discussed the idea as a grand intellectual joke. As he said at the time: "Those who wish to know more about the Establishment are advised to buy *The New York Times* and read between the lines."

A pity we can't do that with the Silks' heavy-handed opus. Compared to the light and fluffy chiffon of the Rovere essay, this book is like a bowl of cold, congealed spaghetti and meat sauce.

—WALTER H. LIEBMAN